

Stewarding...What Is It and Why Should I Do It?

By Jinnie Strickland

The dog, we can all agree is the most important component of a dog show. However one of the most under valued components of a dog show is the ring steward. Aside from being under valued for their actual work on the day of the show, the job of a ring steward is an invaluable teaching tool.

Ring stewarding gives the owner handler an opportunity to observe dogs from the judge's point of view, more so than standing ringside. It also gives the O/H an opportunity to see different breeds and compare movement, structure and ring presentation. This is a benefit professional handlers have by virtue of handling multiple breeds. Another benefit to stewarding would be to help "de-mystify" the judge states Lucretia Coonrod, a breeder owner-handler of German Shorthaired Pointers. She goes on to say "it is also beneficial to be an inside ring steward and get a chance to see exactly or as close to exactly what the judge sees. You can find out that a judge can only judge what he/she can see! Hence presentation is very important."

Owner handlers (OH's) normally handle one or two breeds. Ring stewarding gives the OH a chance to see other breeds up close and personal. You also get to talk to the judges and some of them will tell you why and how they make their choices. That proximity to the judge often gives people the mistaken idea that judges will remember them and put them up later. Most judges remember that you were a great ring steward or not. AKC Judge Janet Robinson says "My advice would be to anyone interested in stewarding is to go to the club and be trained to do the job correctly as it can be very rewarding and a well run ring by a good steward is, for a judge a GREAT DAY."

There are different ways to learn stewarding; the AKC has instructional material available and many show giving kennel clubs run classes for stewarding. Mary Jacobs of Wildrose Irish Wolfhounds recommends "A professional group is a great way to learn the craft and

get paid also. It paid my show expenses for years. It is also required for prospective judges as you learn how a ring is run, etc. If you do steward you'll need to document everything including for whom you stewarded and which breeds."

A job at a dog show that pays money? How is that? Stewarding clubs such as the New Mexico Stewards Association and the Stewards Club of New England contract with show giving clubs to provide stewards for their shows. The association then is paid and the proceeds are split with the members who worked the show. Stewarding associations or clubs provide the training and the work up schedule allowing exhibitors to exhibit and steward. Most associations are quite strict about allowing members to steward for the judge they will be showing to at a cluster. It's just not allowed.

These professional groups work very hard to make dog shows run smoothly. Helen Turin of the Stewards Club of New England says, "I would like it if stewards were accorded the respect that they deserve, you couldn't run a show without them."

With all the advantages of stewarding OH's are missing a great chance to increase their knowledge about dogs and dog shows as well as their judges. If that isn't enough you could as exhibitor Andi Owens puts it "have a good excuse for not showing and you get to drive the other exhibitors crazy worrying about whether you're schmoozing up to the judges!"

Jinnie Strickland, Owner Handler
Solstice Shorthairs
Member, New Mexico Stewards Association

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